
The Paradox of Preservation

MICHÈLE V. CLOONAN

ABSTRACT

This article explores historical, political, and professional paradoxes that underlie efforts to preserve cultural heritage. These paradoxes are illustrated through five case studies: the discovery of the Nag Hammadi bindings, approaches to the preservation of Auschwitz, the Danish cartoons depicting Muhammad, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, and the creation of a protective structure for the Hamar Cathedral ruins. Although it is not possible to preserve everything, it is suggested that the shift from the traditional custodial model of caring for collections to one with greater community input may lead to new preservation strategies—and to new ways of defining preservation. Through our attempts to preserve under highly complex circumstances and equally complex issues, our standard notions of what constitutes preservation come into question, and some aspects of preservation remain paradoxical.

BACKGROUND

When professionals write about the role of cultural institutions, notions such as these are common: “Museums create, manage and preserve varied information about their collections” (White, 2004, p. 9), and, “Art museums are—and traditionally have been—about conserving, curating and exhibiting works in permanent collections and about presenting special exhibitions” (Hamma, 2004, p. 11).¹ There are countless other statements in which preservation is mentioned as one of the two or three most important responsibilities of museums, archives, libraries, and historical societies.

But just what is preservation? Definitions have varied. Before the mid-twentieth century, preservation referred to *collecting*. The very act of acquiring materials and placing them in an institution constituted preservation. When individual items received physical treatment, that was considered *restoration*. Restoration of works of art was originally practiced by artists and craftsmen. Later, the term *conservation* denoted a more scientific approach to treatment. Several American graduate programs in conservation were established after World War II, and conservation became a profession. Conservators focused not only on the treatment of individual objects, but on the external hazards facing collections, such as the environment and disaster mitigation. But by the 1980s, preservation—an umbrella term for the aggregate care of collections—had become a distinct profession. Thus, originally conservation dealt with individual items and with whole collections. (Preservation, conservation, and restoration are used somewhat differently in the moving image archives and historic preservation fields as a perusal of such journals as *History News*, *Future Anterior*, and *The Moving Image* demonstrates. Those differences are beyond the scope of this article.)

There are conceptual differences among archives, libraries, and museums that effect approaches to and definitions of preservation (Cloonan & Sanett, 2002, p. 74). For example, archivists tend to think more in terms of preserving records “for some period of time” (Pearce-Moses, 2005) because as records managers they must comply with the legal obligation to protect records. Also, institutions may have retention schedules that allow for or mandate deaccession after a certain prescribed time. So “preservation” is not always viewed as a permanent activity for some kinds of documents in some institutions. *The preservation of archives and records is defined foremost by the nature and function of the records themselves, and not by the physical location where the records reside.*

Items owned by museums and libraries are preserved simply because they are in the custody of those institutions. Historically, the assumption has been that once these institutions acquired materials, they would be preserved permanently. (Although some libraries engage in periodic collections weeding.²) In museums the concept of ownership is central. Provenance research is undertaken when an item is acquired, and ownership information appears on every caption that is displayed with an artwork; for example, gift of, promised gift of, bequest of, purchased from, etc. Issues of ownership are brought to light when there are controversies. One example is when museums are accused of possessing stolen art. However, there are other examples, such as when museums assume temporary custody of works of art, such as, Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*, which was held by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from 1938 until 1981 when it was returned to Spain after the death of Franco.

The point I am trying to make is this: museums and libraries are custo-

dians of objects, and in that role preservation is a primary responsibility. These institutions are also storehouses in which only a small percentage of items are displayed (in the case of museums) or checked out (in the case of libraries).

Two phenomena have disrupted the “custodial storehouse” model. The first is access. In libraries, books have become increasingly more accessible since the American librarian, John Cotton Dana (1856–1929), first advocated opening the stacks to users in the late nineteenth century. In Dana’s view libraries were not simply storehouses of treasures but community centers. By opening the stacks, he aimed to make libraries more democratic by allowing users to select their own books. From open stacks to online catalog records, to Web-based resources, today information is generally more freely available, though the access is often not to the information itself, but to where the information can be gotten. For analog materials, the “custodial storehouse” model is disrupted, as I have said, because of increased access. But such “disruption” is not to be construed as bad. In fact, it is exactly what libraries exist for. Items must be stored specifically to facilitate access. The storing function is permanent in that between periods of use, items are returned to the storehouse to make future use possible. The storing is temporary only in the sense that items may be temporarily removed from storage. It is the permanent aspect of the storehouse model that constitutes preservation.

The second phenomenon is related to the first: the rise of digital information and the Web. The explosion of digital resources has given people access to seemingly infinite online resources. A recent article about art museums carried the headline: “3 Out of 4 Visitors to the Met Never Make It to the Front Door” (Vogel, 2006). Some 4.5 million visitors travel to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, while another fifteen million access the collections from around the globe. In some cases, new visitors *are* drawn to museums and libraries. However, *what* people do in museums and libraries has shifted somewhat. They may go for a jazz concert, or to meet someone for lunch, grab a latté, or shop in the stores yet never set foot in the galleries.

With respect to libraries and the Web, there is an exponential increase in the “use” of collections. I put “use” in quotation marks because the paper-, film-, or other material-based items locatable on the Web are often not full texts but bibliographic records that lead to the texts, which themselves are in physical form. It is the physical forms we are preserving for users.

An increasing number of texts and images, however, are born digital and exist only in that format. These may be universally accessible online—in full text—but their preservation is of serious concern in the library/archival community because of the evanescence and eventual obsolescence of the hardware and software we must use to access the texts.

Preservation has different meanings in different contexts; but one concept is common to all these definitions: the notion that it is possible to maintain collections, if not indefinitely, at least for as long as possible. Adding to that burden, today a Louvre or a Harvard must preserve not only its physical collections, but its online resources as well. As I have said, both kinds of preservation present challenges.

Questions that are forcing us to rethink the meaning of “preservation” include: who owns the information? If it is not the library or the museum, who will be responsible for preservation? Who will pay for the preservation costs? What are the differences between physical and digital collections? How will cultural heritage institutions preserve the digital information they are now creating such as Web sites, blogs, and wikis—not to mention new-model scholarship (Smith, 2003)? What will post-custodial models look like? How will libraries continue to foster new-model scholarship? What about the information that libraries are now creating, such as Web sites? And what about the more disruptive and constantly evolving Web 2.0 with its folksonomies and wikis?

THE PARADOX

A paradox is “a seemingly sound piece of reasoning based on seemingly true assumptions that leads to a contradiction” (Audi, 1999, p. 643). In the case of defining preservation, it may be that our long-held assumptions are false; *can we still assume that it is possible to maintain collections indefinitely or even for a long time?*

A paradox is said to be put to rest when the mistaken principles or assumptions are clearly identified and unraveled. Is our assumption that permanence is achievable a paradox?

I will present five “case studies” that challenge our assumptions about what needs to be preserved and how to achieve this. I will conclude with some observations about digital preservation and consider whether the challenges are new, or whether they have been with us all along. Finally, I will attempt to put the paradox to rest.

THE NAG HAMMADI BINDINGS: OUT OF THE GROUND AND INTO THE FRAY

In December 1945, an Arab peasant (Muhammad ‘Ali) and his brothers ventured out of Nag Hammadi, about three hundred miles south of Cairo, to the Jabal al-Tarif, a mountain honeycombed with caves (La Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi [BCNH] Web site: <http://www.ftsrlaval.ca/bcnh/decouverte.asp?Ing=ang>). Allegedly they were digging for a soft soil that they used to fertilize their crops. They discovered a large earthenware jar, nearly a meter high. Inside were thirteen papyrus codices bound in leather. The brothers brought the books home where their mother used some of the loose papyrus leaves to kindle the fire in her

oven. The family initially hid the books, but not before someone had seen one and sent it to a friend in Cairo. The brothers gave some of the other codices to a priest. Soon one codex was sold on the black market through an antiquities dealer. The Egyptian government was able to seize ten and a half of the thirteen books and place them in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. One codex left Egypt, and the remaining one-and-a-half codices presumably burned in 'Ali Muhammad's mother's oven.

The manuscripts, dating from the fourth century (though probably copied from even earlier texts) contain Gnostic texts, which challenge the version of the life of Christ described in the four Gospels. These texts recently became more widely known through *The DaVinci Code*. But the bindings are of equal interest to book historians, codicologists, and conservators because "Coptic bindings form the oldest surviving 'family' of leather bookbindings, and represent the ultimate source of all decorated bindings whether Near Eastern or European" (Miner, 1957, p. 15). The only surviving original bindings before about 700 AD are Egyptian and post-date the Nag Hammadi bindings.

Prior to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, the Pierpont Morgan Library acquired, between 1911 and 1920, fifty-two Coptic bindings that had been excavated from the monastery of St. Michael of the Desert in the Fayum (near Cairo). These bindings date from the eighth to tenth centuries. The Nag Hammadi bindings, written and bound in the first half of the fourth century, are nearly four hundred years older. Yet, remarkably, many of the features of the later bindings were already in place in these earliest ones. The covers are goatskin or sheepskin. The upper covers have flaps and ties, similar to later Islamic bindings. Several of the bindings are decorated (Needham, 1979, pp. 5-6). Every feature of them has been studied, and they continue to be models for conservation students as well as those interested in the history of bookbinding structures.

The history of the Nag Hammadi codices has parallels to the history of other artifacts that have been partially destroyed after so-called "excavation." Would these codices have been better preserved if left in the ground? Or put another way, does what we have learned about Gnostic texts and Near Eastern codicology justify the damage that was done to the books? Were the codices better served by preservation in the buried earthenware jars? Twenty-six years ago I went to the Coptic Museum to see the codices. The librarian was on his way out to lunch but I persuaded him to let me see them. He led me to his desk and pulled a couple of them out of his desk drawer. Today they have better housing, but given their poor storage then, not to mention their earlier rough handling, these books had already been compromised.

As a case study these bindings present several issues in the preservation world, as I have suggested. If the books had remained in the ground, they would not have been compromised, damaged, or destroyed. The

paradox is evident. For had they remained buried, we would not know of them; thus the important information we have gotten from them would not be ours.

As with the discovery of a frozen mammoth, its fine condition was guaranteed while it was frozen. But for scientists to learn anything from it, it had to be thawed. Thawing guaranteed its destruction. In this case, as with the Nag Hammadi bindings, the loss of some material—or the loss of some information from the deterioration caused by careless handling—is more than compensated for by what we were able to learn. True, the books' destruction or deterioration was more preventable than was the loss of the mammoth. But the great advances in scholarship we made from these bindings almost completely justified the original poor handling of them. The paradox is partially unraveled: some "destruction" or "loss" can be more than balanced by our gain. Another way to look at this is that before these volumes came to light, there was nothing to preserve. As far as we were concerned, they didn't exist. Now that we have them, and now that they are in an institution, we are preserving them. Is it true that all things eventually deteriorate? Maybe so, but our aim as preservationists is to slow down that deterioration as best we can to prolong the longevity of objects.

Sometimes at issue is whether something *should* be preserved, and if it should, for how long and in what form? These questions have surrounded the Nazi Concentration Camps since the end of World War II. While some people felt that the concentration camps "should be left to fall into ruins" (Ryback, 1993, p. 77), the prevailing sentiment has been that it is important to maintain evidence of the atrocities committed at the camps. As early as 1947, the Polish parliament determined that Auschwitz would be "forever preserved as a memorial to the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other peoples" (as cited in Baker, n.d.). Today, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The UNESCO World Heritage Center (n.d.) description of the site reads in part:

The fortified walls, barbed wire, platforms, barracks, gallows, gas chambers and crematorium ovens show the conditions within which the Nazi genocide took place in the former concentration and extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest in the Third Reich. . . . [and] the symbol of humanity's cruelty to its fellow human beings in the 20th century.

The problem is that the concentration camps were purpose-built and not intended to last. As a member of the Warsaw Cultural Ministry has noted:

The Germans built the camp with the intention of exterminating an entire race and then destroying all the evidence of this deed. Everything was poorly made—the barracks, the crematoriums, the paper used



Figure 1. Auschwitz. Bearing Witness to Massacre. (photo courtesy of Russell Yarwood)

for documents. It is difficult to preserve something that was made to vanish. (Ryback, p. 80)

It should be pointed out, however, that though the camps were designed to be temporary, millions of pieces of ephemera are being stored “to perpetuity” in libraries and archives. Just because these items were conceived as ephemeral does not mean that we should let them die. In fact, it is our mandate to preserve them as items casting light on an important event. In the 1980s the Jewish Center Foundation in New York City raised money for the restoration of the decaying camp. Proposals for the site ranged from modest intervention to large-scale reconstruction. The completed restoration will be closer to large-scale reconstruction. This is

because Auschwitz is not just a memorial; it is also an archive, museum, gathering place, and hallowed ground. More modest intervention would have placed limits on how the camp could now be used.

One of the most emotionally powerful preservation issues has been what to do with the collection of deteriorating human hair. Some devout Jews believe that the hair should be buried, while some former prisoners feel that the hair should be maintained for as long as possible "since it is among the most eloquent evidence of the Holocaust; few other things left behind by the victims are more shocking or unusually suggestive" (Mensfelt, 2004). Still others believe that the hair "bears witness" to the events of the war and provides incontrovertible evidence to those who deny that the Holocaust took place.

With a site as psychologically and cataclysmically powerful as Auschwitz or, more recently, with the World Trade Center memorial and museum, decision making becomes a community activity. Preservation strategies inevitably become a series of compromises because many different views need to be accommodated.

Part of the problem is that such decision making is rooted not merely in logic and analytical thinking but also in emotion. How many family members and friends died at these sites? How does such a loss strike individuals? Some people want to eradicate all memory of the horror, all traces of the terrible cruelty. Others, with the deeply rooted urgency to remember those they have lost, wish to commemorate the losses and to maintain the sites as a warning. It is a paradox to those charged with deciding what to do with those sites to try to please everyone. It can't be done. And no compromise seems feasible. If anything is left, those wanting eradication are not served. If nothing is left—that is, if all traces of the site are eradicated, those wanting a *place* of memory will be thwarted. What should the preservationist do?

As I have pointed out, a concomitant issue emanates from the earlier quotation that it is difficult to preserve something that was made to vanish. This is the very issue raised in the world of libraries and archives with respect to ephemera, playbills, posters, leaflets, newspapers, and the like, which are typically produced on flimsy media. Librarians and archivists, recognizing the research value of these items, have cognizantly decided to preserve just about every kind of ephemera that there is, even to the extent, in some cases, of spending large amounts of money on their conservation.

If this analogy is apt, then the preservation of Auschwitz is justifiable, not at all paradoxical.

SEE NO EVIL

More recently, an international controversy has arisen over the publication in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of several caricatures of

Muhammad. The strong Muslim sentiment against the cartoons creates a potential dilemma for archivists and curators of Islamic collections; should the cartoons be acquired and preserved? Cataloged? Made available to researchers? Exhibited?

The magnitude of the reaction to the cartoons around the world was strong enough that one might suppose that any major collection of Islamic materials would want to have copies not only of the cartoons, but of the international reactions to them. To find out what my colleagues might do, I informally polled curators of six large Islamic collections in American institutions. My respondents agreed that such items would be important to collect. Further, each of the curators stressed the importance of not backing away from collecting controversial items. One wrote:

Everything is grist for the historian, and, in this case, the culture critics, political scientists, constitutional scholars, and so on, so I would acquire and catalogue, as you would any artifacts in print, whether text or image, but not display or advertise. (J. Spurr, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Another added:

There are many activists within the academic and non-academic world who are trying to extract and ban various collections for many reasons. Libraries have an obligation to preserve 'primary sources,' including the cartoons that have spurred the riots and the killings. How else can [we] study the violent protests and diplomatic upheaval that ensued [after] the publication of the cartoons. (S. Khanaka, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

The New Yorker ran a cartoon that weighs in on the controversy, captioned, "Please Enjoy this Culturally, Ethnically, Religiously, and Politically Correct Cartoon Responsibly"; it is blank (Shaw, 2006, p. 30).

A related issue for repositories concerns the violent reaction to these cartoons. Is it safe for any institution to preserve them? Are the institutions opening themselves up to attack by housing the cartoons? Also, if, as one of my respondents suggested, the institution collected them but did not display them, would they be open for use? Would anyone be aware of their existence? If the answer to either of these two last questions is "no," then preserving them serves no immediate purpose, even though long-term preservation may be achieved. Here is where the paradox lies. Preservation of a useless item or collection is illogical. The collection would serve just as much use as if it were destroyed. What is the preservationist to do? If my respondents are right—collecting and preserving is in order—then the institution must be willing to live with the potential consequences and guard against the dangers they raise.

It is clear that preservation decisions may be multifaceted. In selecting items to preserve, the curator must be cognizant of the sensitivities that may ensue and the other issues they may face. Furthermore, as I suggest,

any decision will undergo the scrutiny of library users or museum-goers who may hold divergent opinions.

Collecting the Danish cartoons is a form of preservation, as I have suggested at the outset. Making decisions in the short term for the long term is another paradoxical aspect of preservation.

The fate of the Bamiyan Buddhas could be dubbed "The Saddest Preservation Story Ever Told." Exactly six months before 9/11, on March 11, 2001, the Buddhas in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, were destroyed by the Taliban. This was not a sudden assault, but a calculated one. Mullah Mohammed Omar had issued an edict against un-Islamic representational figures before 2001, and the Taliban had already begun destroying ancient sculptures, a move that some have described as archaeological terrorism.

Dating from 507 and 551 AD, the Buddhas, giant stone statues, were once prominent when the Bamiyan Valley was part of the Silk Road. But Buddhists have long ceased to live in Afghanistan, and international advocacy of the sculptures had no sway with the Taliban.

After the site had been bombed, UNESCO sent a mission to Bamiyan to assess the condition of the site and to cover the remaining stone blocks to protect them during the winter of 2001-02 (Manhart, 2005). Funds were later raised to carry out further preservation of the site.

The loss of the statues is an example of a failure of international diplomacy. Preservation is often contingent upon the balance of international relations. If the Taliban, or any other group, refuses to recognize UNESCO treaties, then cultural heritage becomes vulnerable (Cloonan, 2007). Whether the destruction is of monumental sculptures (as in Bamiyan) or of archives (as in Bosnia), workable solutions are not always at hand. In the trial against Slobodan Milošević in The Hague, András Riedlmayer, a librarian at Harvard, testified that the systematic destruction of books, legal records, and other archives constituted cultural genocide and should be considered a war crime. Since Milošević's death in March 2006, this doctrine has yet to be established by an international court.

As I stated earlier, we must approach preservation differently from the way we have in the past. Just as old models of international collaboration failed to save the Bamiyan Buddhas, old models of institutional preservation will not necessarily be effective across cultures or for digital preservation, which to carry out the international metaphor, is "without borders."

But the point here is that—for the Taliban at least—the Buddhas should not have been preserved. As with the intentional destruction of any piece of cultural heritage—books, statues, graves, gas chambers, or any other property, even language and customs—the need or impulse or imperative to preserve is not universal (Cloonan, 2007). We each bring to this field our own Western sensibilities, our own strategies and practices. What do we do, how should we think, if our notions come into conflict with those of other cultures who view preservation differently? A pair of

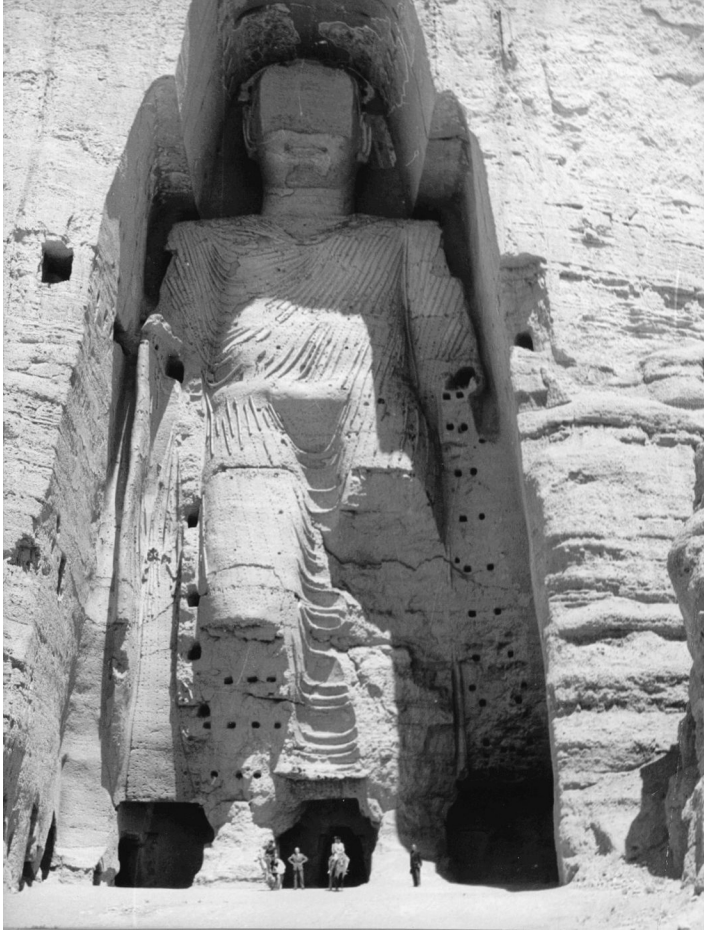


Figure 2. Here Today, and Gone Tomorrow. Bamiyan Buddha (1970) prior to damage. (Photo courtesy of UNESCO.)

conflicting attitudes from opposing cultures kindles the paradoxical situation with respect to the preservation of objects. Situations like this force us to rethink what our responsibilities are.

INTERLUDE: DIGITAL PRESERVATION

There is no dearth of literature about digital preservation. Technical, legal, and practical issues have all been addressed in countless publications. One work, Abby Smith's *New Model Scholarship: How Will It Survive?* (Smith, 2003) discusses the concept of stewardship, which is applicable to both the digital and the artifactual realms.

New-Model scholarship refers to new forms of digital works, which may

be experiential, open-ended, interactive, software-intensive, multimedia, and, often, unpublished. Sometimes the long-term preservation model is not appropriate because the works are still in flux. And other needs—access, low-cost distribution, interactivity, malleability—may be more important than preservation. Since preservation—as one of many responsibilities of librarians, archivists, and museum personnel—costs money, and since there is never enough money, preservation may not merit expenditures when the institution sees higher priorities.

Two preservation models, which work well in this environment, are the enterprise- and the community-based models. The University of California, Stanford, MIT, and Harvard, practice variations of the enterprise model by providing digital infrastructures that can support new-model scholarship such as institutional repositories. Community-based models use third-person preservation services. Smith identifies the Center for Research Libraries, JSTOR and the Internet Archive, as potential models for the community-based approach.

The community-based approach to preservation is also used to mean something different: the ability of everyone to be involved in preservation decision making. For example, in Berlin there was considerable public dialog about the design and site selection for a new Holocaust memorial. And in San Francisco, citizens selected—via the Internet—which historic building would receive preservation funding, in an “American Idol”-like poll set up by the grant funders (Nolte, 2006).

Is a pluralistic approach to preservation useful? Or, will it lead to too much preservation?

Rem Koolhaas has asserted that “Preservation Is Overtaking Us” (2004). He looked at old practices with respect to the interval between the creation of an object or the occurrence of an event and what was preserved. In 1818 the notion of preservation was that objects two thousand years old need to be preserved; in 1900 it was two hundred years; and now it is twenty years; or less. Koolhaas has not undertaken a systematic, historic study of preservation. Rather, he is trying to make the point that we sometimes preserve items before we have ascertained whether they have value.

Koolhaas believes that we are about to experience the “slightly absurd moment, namely that preservation is overtaking us. Maybe we can be the first to actually experience the moment that preservation is no longer a retroactive activity but becomes a prospective activity” (Koolhaas, 2004, p. 2). In historic preservation there has been a move from only preserving ancient or religious buildings to preserving structures and sites with “more sociological substance . . . to the point that we now preserve concentration camps, department stores, factories and amusement rides. . . . [E]verything we inhabit is potentially susceptible to preservation” (Koolhaas, 2004, p. 1).

Actually, archivists and librarians—particularly those working in a digital environment—have already figured out that preservation must be prospective, which is why metadata, trusted repositories, and light and dark archives are the strategies du jour. When we risk losing so much, do we have the time to make value judgments about what to save? Or by trying to save so much, is everything we *read* “susceptible to preservation”?

SYNTHESIS: POETRY OF REASON

It is appropriate to end this discussion with an additional example: the restoration of the Hamar Cathedral, which was built in the beginning of the thirteenth century near Oslo, Norway. In 1567, during the Seven-Year War, the cathedral was set on fire. Later, the ruins were used as a quarry. The cathedral’s stones were carried away to be used in the construction of other buildings. And over time the cruel winters reduced the masonry still further. How to preserve it?

The architectural firm Lund & Slaatto created a protective glass structure consisting of 1,675 panes of glass with 690 shapes (“The Protective Structure,” 2004). While glass cases and other protective enclosures are not novel, their purpose is usually to restrict the use of the original. In this case, it has increased its use. The new structure is magisterial, evoking the original basilica with its high nave and lower vaulted sides. “The protective structure is primarily a technological rig providing protection from the elements, to preserve the ruins in a climate-controlled environment” (p. 121). Yet, as the architects also point out, “the universe forms a visible vault above the ruined basilica, at all times of the day, night and year—indeed a very poetic and beautiful concept! (p. 124). Since the restoration, the building has once again become a gathering place for weddings and other ceremonies.

The paradox is that the overall structure—the ruins plus its glass encasement—now constitutes the overall notion of “cathedral.” The preservation activity yielded a new concept of what the building literally and figuratively stood for.

PARADOX REDUX?

We can preserve some things some of the time; but not everything all of the time, and we cannot operate purely under an old custodial model. In fact, the model seems to have a major flaw in it in that it looks at preservation only from the view that preservation is imperative. As I have indicated, this is not always the case. The role of libraries, archives, and museums has gradually transitioned from “cabinets of curiosity” and “storehouses of knowledge” to dynamic models of outreach. Today, users and visitors are just as likely to read journal articles online, or view in Iceland, the collections of the Getty, as they are to enter the physical doors of a museum or library. At the same time, branches of museums such as the

Guggenheim are opening around the world, and the Louvre is "renting" its collections to a museum on the newly created Saadiyat Island, off Abu Dhabi. Since access to knowledge aims to become universal, our notions of preservation must continue to evolve to accommodate the imperatives of all our clientele. With a world's worth of cultures with myriad views, we are facing what might be a truly unsolvable paradox. The more users we reach out to, the less likely we are to achieve any consensus on what to preserve and how to do it.

There is no irony in the title of this paper. Preservation is indeed a paradox, without a universal solution. It is important that we incorporate all of its manifestations—all of its reasoning—when we engage in preservation activities. The Paradox of Preservation refers to the problems we all face in deciding what to do. The solution to the problems is uncertain and the definitions of preservation will continue to evolve.

NOTES

1. Thanks to Sidney E. Berger and Ross Harvey for their suggestions. Hugh K. Tuslow and Patsy Baudoin gave me invaluable assistance in gathering data and images for this article.
2. Weeding is not universally accepted. However, a recent bibliography demonstrates that there are a lot of publications that recommend the practice. See: American Library Association. (2006). *Weeding library collections: A selected annotated bibliography for collection evaluation*. ALA library fact sheet number 15. Chicago: American Library Association.

REFERENCES

- Audi, R. (Ed.). (1999). *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Baker, Z. (n.d.). *In fitting memory: The art and politics of Holocaust memorials*. Retrieved February 27, 2007, from <http://library.stanford.edu/depts/spc/exhibits/nowinonlineholo.html>.
- Cloonan, M. V. (2007). The moral imperative to preserve. *Library Trends*, 55, 746–755.
- Cloonan, M. V., & Sanett, S. (2002). Preservation strategies for electronic records: Where we are now—Obliquity and squint? *American Archivist*, 65, 70–106.
- Hamma, K. (2004). Becoming digital. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 30(5), 11–13.
- Koolhaas, R. (2004). Preservation is overtaking us. *Future Anterior* 1(2), 1–3.
- Manhart, C. (2005). *UNESCO's activities for the rehabilitation of Bamiyan*. Unpublished report prepared for UNESCO, Paris.
- Mensfelt, J. (2004). *Preserving original camp relics: Philosophy, theory and practice*. Retrieved February 27, 2007, from <http://www.auschwitz-muzeum.oswiecim.pl/new/index.php?tryb=news&rok=2004&language=EN>.
- Miner, D. (1957). *The history of bookbinding, 525–1950 A.D.: An exhibition held at the Baltimore Museum of Art, November 12, 1957 to January 12, 1958*. Baltimore, MD: The Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery.
- Needham, P. (1979). *Twelve centuries of bookbindings, 400–1600*. New York: Pierpont Morgan Library.
- Nolte, C. (2006, November 2). Maybeck Church wins preservation grant for seismic upgrade in Internet vote: In Internet vote, it beats Angel Island immigration station. *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. B1. Retrieved February 28, 2007, from <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/11/02/BAGHOM4FNV1.DTL&hw=maybeck+church+preservation&sn=001&sc=1000>.
- Pearce-Moses, R. (2005). *A glossary of archival and records terminology* [Electronic version]. Chicago: Society of American Archivists. Retrieved February 27, 2007, from <http://www.archivists.org/glossary/index.asp>.

- The protective structure for Hamar Cathedral ruins. (2004). *Living Architecture*, 19, 116–125.
- Ryback, T. W. (1993, November 15). Evidence of evil. *The New Yorker*, 69, 68–81.
- Shaw, M. (2006, February 27). Please enjoy this culturally, ethnically, religiously, and politically correct cartoon responsibly. Thank you. *The New Yorker*, 82, 30.
- Smith, A. (2003). *New-Model scholarship: How will it survive?* Washington, DC: The Council on Library and Information Resources.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.) *Auschwitz concentration camp*. Retrieved February 27, 2007, from <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/31>.
- Vogel, C. (2006, March 29). 3 out of 4 visitors to the Met never make it to the front door. *The New York Times*, Section G, p. 18.
- White, L. (2004). Museum informatics: Collections, people, access, use. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 30(5), 9–10.

Michèle V. Cloonan is Dean and Professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College, in Boston, where she teaches courses in preservation. Prior to that she was Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Professor Cloonan began her career as a book and paper conservator at the Newberry Library in Chicago. She was the first Preservation Officer at Brown University and was Rare Book Curator at Smith College. She has published extensively in the areas of preservation, bibliography, and book trade history.